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CATALOGUE

OF

A TERRA-COTTA BUST BY HOUDON

The Property of the late Sir Bernard Eckstein, BT.
[SOLD BY ORDER OF THE EXECUTORS]

AND

A MARBLE RELIEF BY VERROCCHIO

The Property of a Gentleman

Day of Sale:

FRIDAY, THE 8TH OF JULY

At ELEVEN o'clock precisely

1949

Illustrated Catalogue (4 Plates)

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Lot 1

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LOT 1

A SUPERB TERRA-COTTA BUST OF SABINE HOUDON *by her father Jean Antoine Houdon, signed and dated "Houdon* 179—", her head slightly turned to her right, the features with a pleased expression, about to break into a smile, her hair depicted naturally falling slightly over the ears and in curls at the back of her neck; she is dressed in a low square-cut smock with plain neck-band and short frilled sleeves embroidered round the edge; the bust is supported on a circular grey marble socle, 17¾*in.*,

[*continued*

LOT 1—*continued*

*** From the Greffulhe Collection sold in these Rooms 23rd July, 1937, lot 44.

Sabine Houdon, the sculptor's eldest child, was born March 6th, 1787; busts of her at the age of ten months are in the Collections of Mrs. Harkness (marble) and Madame Brincard (plaster).

Others at the age of four in plaster and bronze are in the Jules Strauss and Auclair Collections; there is a well-known plaster bust in the Louvre, at the age of five or six, marble examples of which are in the Rueff and George Gould Collections.

See *La Vie et l'Oeuvre de Houdon* by G. Giacometti, vol. II, p. 75.

[*See* ILLUSTRATION]

The Property of a Gentleman

LOT 2

A MARBLE RELIEF OF THE HEAD AND SHOULDERS OF A HELMETED WARRIOR BY ANDREA DEL VERROCCHIO.

The subject is seen in profile and wears a typically Verrocchiesque helmet, the crest formed as a winged two-footed dragon, snarling and breathing fire. The visor, secured by a pin shaped as a conventional flower, is carved with palmettes and a flower-head linked by "S"-scrolls and foliage; a slender foliate scroll extends backwards from the hinge-pin. The helmet is constructed to simulate twelve plates decorated with beading, dog-tooth ornament, rope-twist, a lattice design, a bead and reel moulding, an arcaded motif with pellets and a pattern of narrow parallel slots bordered by beading. Projecting below the helmet is a line of curls sharply executed, many accented with a drill mark; a curl also softens the line of the forehead. The aquiline profile and face is sculpted with great sensibility, the modelling of the cheek, the underlying bone structure of which is clearly expressed, being particularly sensitive.

The warrior wears an elaborate cuirass, the upstanding collar ornamented with a motif of pellets, scrolls and drill marks. The cuirass itself is composed of small plates forming a scale pattern, the scales graduated in size, the angle of each accentuated by a drill hole. The front of the cuirass bears a snarling Medusa mask with streaming hair. The pauldron is in the shape of a lion mask with knitted brows. From the back a drapery softens the transition between the cuirass and the plain marble background.

[*continued*

LOT 2—*continued*

The relief is a remarkable example of quattrocento sculpture. The condition and patina are admirable, as is the rough and satisfying chiselling of the back of the panel.
The whole is contained in a simple moulding, broken at the base by the projecting cuirass and drapery and above by the pricked ears of the dragon.

$16\frac{3}{8}$*in. high by* $12\frac{3}{8}$*in. wide*

[*See* ILLUSTRATIONS]

** Four sculptures in marble by Verrocchio are accepted by modern critics: the Lavabo in San Lorenzo; the bust of Alexander belonging to Mrs. Herbert N. Strauss; certain figures of the Forteguerri monument in Pistoia and the half-length figure of a woman in the Bargello.
Is it possible to include the present sculpture in this group?
All the marble sculptures by Verrocchio have been the subject of dispute. The Lavabo was attributed in 1510 by Albertini to Antonio Rossellino. The Anonimo Magliabecchiano and Vasari state that it is a joint product of Donatello and Verrocchio. In the middle of the 18th Century it was given to Donatello. To-day it is generally accepted as being the work of Verrocchio. The authorship of the Strauss bust of Alexander has been disputed. The Bargello portrait has been given to Leonardo by Mackowsky and others. Alone Verrocchio's responsibility for the Pistoia monument is confirmed by contemporary documents and the majority of the work has recently been shown to be unquestionably by his hand. It is the Pistoia monument, therefore, that is the touchstone, the authority to which other Verrocchiesque marble sculptures have to be referred. Fortunately remarkable photographs of this work are available in *The Unfinished Monument by Andrea*

[*continued*

Lot 2

LOT 2—*continued*

del Verrocchio to the Cardinal Niccolo Forteguerri at Pistoia, by Clarence Kennedy, Elizabeth Wilder and Peleo Bacci (Northampton, Mass., 1932), a publication which greatly enlarged Verrocchio's *œuvre* in sculpture.

The treatment of the hair of the present sculpture should be compared with that of the angels in the Forteguerri monument. The way in which the strands of hair below the two small chips in the helmet run on to the flesh of the neck is almost identical with strands of the hair of the lower angel to the left in the Forteguerri monument (Clarence Kennedy, *op. cit.*, pl. XIIIa) and the treatment of the curls is also very similar in both sculptures (Plate XIIIb). The curls projecting below the helmet seem to have more sculptural quality and form than those of the Forteguerri upper angels to the left (Plate VIa) and right (Plate X). A comparison between the treatment of the eye of the present sculpture and of those of the Forteguerri angels is interesting (Plates X and XIIIa). The incised line above and below the edges of both eyelids is present in all three sculptures, as is the accented acute angle at the juncture of the two lids. The tightly pursed mouth, the upper lip a little overshot, is to be found in the figure of Faith (Plate XXIIIa). The curious childlike innocence of expression of the mouth is typical of Verrocchio and is to be found in the David, the Or San Michele group and elsewhere.

The angular, metallic folds of the drapery should be compared with those of the sleeve of Christ (Plate II) or of the robe of the angel to the upper right (Plate XII) and there are a number of other close comparisons to be found (e.g. Plate XIV).

Finally the patina appears to be closely related to that of parts of the Forteguerri monument, the peculiar powdery surface of the incised lines being visible, for instance, in Plate Va.

A comparison between the dragon crest of the present sculpture

[*continued*

LOT 2—*continued*

and that of the Alexander relief (Leo Planiscig: Andrea del Verrocchio, Schroll Verlag, Vienna, Plate 37) is interesting. In the work under discussion the form is less contorted and closely follows that of the outline of the helmet. The treatment of the scaling of the back of the dragon is almost identical with that of the legs of the Strauss dragon. The wings are more closely connected with an earlier work, the Lavabo of S. Lorenzo, where those of the sirens supporting the basin are also incised in places with the motif of a dot with a circle, which is commonly used by Verrocchio. The reticulations of the belly of the dragon, an echo of the plates of the helmet, is paralleled in the treatment of the body of the left hand siren of the Lavabo (Planiscig, Plate 12). The feet of the dragon with the shaggy fetlocks and hammer toes should also be compared with the bronze feet of the Medici tomb (Planiscig, Plate 20).

Almost every motif employed on the helmet is found elsewhere in the work of Verrocchio. The palmettes, placed alternately upright and inverted, and linked by elongated "S"-scrolls, are found on the cavetto moulding at the top of the upright shaft of the Lavabo (Planiscig, Plate 12). The treatment of the half palmette on the front of the visor should be compared with that on a moulding on the base of an urn in the stone framework of the Medici tomb (Planiscig, Plate 24) and with the decoration of the shoulder of the Giuliano bust (Planiscig, Plate 39). The beading, the spirally twisted moulding and the bead and reel motif are found on the stone framework of the Medici tomb (Planiscig, Plates 22 and 23) and elsewhere. The arcaded motif with pellets is used on the basin of the San Lorenzo Lavabo (Planiscig, Plate 12), as is the motif of parallel slots, an ornament which is also used on the helmets of the Alexander and of the Colleoni (Planiscig, Plates 37 and 75),

[*continued*

Lot 2

LOT 2—*continued*

and on the breast plate of Giuliano de' Medici (Planiscig, Plate 39). The spiral finial of the neckpiece of the helmet is found in the Darius relief (Planiscig, Plate 38) and again, but this time on the visor, in the Alexander (Planiscig, Plate 37).

The features and hair are more closely connected with those of certain figures in the Forteguerri monument than with other sculptures, but a comparison with the profile of the Colleoni (Planiscig, Plate 75) is not without interest.

The flattened crown of the head of this sculpture is curious, the helmet appearing not to allow enough head-room. This distortion is found elsewhere in Verrocchio, for instance in the Alexander relief (Planiscig, Plate 37).

The lion mask pauldron, a stock-in-trade of the quattrocento armourer, is seen in the Opera del' Duomo silver relief (Planiscig, Plate 36). In both the knitted eyebrows are accented, in the sculpture by drill marks and in the silver relief by small depressions. The curious scale-like treatment of the lips of the lion is repeated in the mask of the Lavabo (Planiscig, Plate 12).

The drapery is closely paralleled by that of the Alexander relief (Planiscig, Plate 37) which is similar to the present sculpture in other respects—for instance the neck line which perversely runs backwards, being higher in front than at the back, and the curious way in which the breastplate and drapery project outwards at an improbable or even impossible angle. In the Alexander this effect is achieved by shoulders being turned slightly, although this movement is not satisfactorily explained and anatomically the relationship of the arm to the rest of the body is impossible.

The similarities and comparisons quoted above show that the present relief is a work closely connected with Verrocchio. Is it by the master or a workshop product ? Elizabeth Wilder has convincingly shown (*op. cit.*, p. 44) that it was the habit

[*continued*

LOT 2—*continued*

of Verrocchio to follow the practice of a bronze worker in his marble sculpture—to work himself on the most important points—faces, hands and certain draperies—and to leave the execution of the remainder to his assistants. This would be the normal practice in the workshop of a sculptor in bronze and bronze founder.

The curious dryness of treatment evident in the carving of certain details of the present sculpture—the dragon's wings, the foliage on the helmet and the ornament on the collar of the cuirass—are typical of certain passages in Verrocchio's work. They are to be found on the stone frame of the Medici tomb (Planiscig, Plates 22-24); also in early works such as the candelabrum made for the Palazzo della Signoria (Planiscig, Plate 11) and the upright shaft of the Lavabo. It is also present to a marked degree in a later work. In the Alexander the foliate decoration of the neckband is lifeless and the face —so poor in comparison with that of the present sculpture and anticipating an almost 19th Century classicism—is that of an artist's lay figure.

The superb quality of the modelling of the face and the treatment of the hair—both so closely parralleled in the Forteguerri monument—together with the vitality of the Medusa mask justify the attribution of the relief to Verrocchio himself and not to the workshop of the master.

It is possible that this sculpture is a portrait; but it is more likely that it was intended as an idealized warrior. Thus it was a precursor of the contrasting prototypes of antique heroes which haunted Leonardo throughout his life, the epicene Alexander and ferocious Darius ordered by Lorenzo the Magnificent from Verrocchio and sent as a present to Matthias Corvinus, King of Hungary. Dr. Leo Planiscig attributes the

[*continued*

LOT 2—*continued*

present sculpture to Verrocchio and suggests that it may be connected with this commission.

The relief has been in England since the middle of the 19th Century; nothing is at present known regarding its earlier history.

The style suggests a date considerably earlier than the Alexander. The latter, with the Leonardesque twining ribbons, is dated about 1480. The present work may be later than the Lavabo (possibly completed by or before 1469) and roughly contemporary with the Medici tomb (1472).

END OF SALE

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8th July, 1949

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